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LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
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Monmouth, Illinois.

The Warren County Library and Reading Room Association.

1868---1902.

This institution is now the growth of one third of a century, with more to follow. It has steadily developed in those directions for which funds have been given. A broad foundation has been laid, upon which the future can build, safe and large.

THE READING ROOM

as opened June 1st, 1868, and was then known as the Monmouth Reading Room and Library. Twenty five persons collected and paid in \$2,500 to meet the estimated expenses for two years. They formed themselves into an association of directors. Mr. N. A. Rankin was elected president. Judge Ivory Quinby gave the use of a room located at the corner of Broadway and First street. He outlined the plan and wrote the constitution, which is substantially unchanged after the thirty-four years of trial. He aided in the selection of the first directors and of the periodicals. He gave the best thought and mature judgment of his last years to planning a library and thus helped to a success which he did not live to see.

From 1868 to the time of his death in 1877, Mr. Wm. Laferty was the treasurer. He began the prudent and conservative financial policy which is ruled ever since.

During the first two years no books were bought. Unbound magazines were loaned for home use, and also used in the reading room.

From the first meeting of the directors, held in the law office of Stewart & Phelps, Feb. 3, 1868,

MR. W. P. PRESSLY

as an interested member. During the year 1870 he erected and deeded trust to this Association, a brick building 42x75 feet, at the southwest corner of the public square. The rents of two large business rooms on the first floor sustain the building and buy a constant supply of books. The second story was designed for a library and reading room. This

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was the first building in the state built and given as a library for popular use. It is a gift which produces income and is self-perpetuating.

Mr. Pressly's expressed wishes were that library privileges be extended to people living in the country and that books be bought attractive to the generality of readers and to the young. Thus a childless man provided for the pleasure and the instruction of the children. A business man, he embodied in this gift the practical ideas of his life as a successful merchant, whose custom had been largely from out of town.

It was his idea that considerable population is needful for a large and prosperous public library and that popular goods must be bought in accord with the common wants of customers in order to attract readers. He selected a site where rentals are valuable and where people from all directions can exchange books without loss of time when they come shopping. Thus his purpose was as practical as the intent of a store or of a bank. The management has been based on business principles rather than on bookish ideals.

His gifts for this purpose amounted to over \$20,000. And in addition to this, about 18,000 of the volumes now on the shelves have been bought from the income of the W. P. Pressly foundation. People use these books throughout the county and beyond. The founder's purpose of returning to those in town and country from whom he had received, has been accomplished. Young people especially prize the advantages provided for them by one who lives to see the good he has done. He has often expressed his satisfaction with the results attained, saying, "I thank God that he led me to build this building." His faith has ever been that proclaimed by the greatest of the poets:

"There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."

The enlargement of the scope of the institution to include the country, led to a change of the name. It is of interest to note that the name selected was taken because it had been used during

THE PIONEER DAYS

of this community.

The oldest record book in our court house shows that a Warren County Library was started January 12, 1836. That was less than nine years after the first white man settled in this county, which then extended to the Mississippi river. The log court house had then been built only four and a half years.

The first trustees of that library were James McCallon, Elijah Davidson, James P. Hogue and George H. Wright. The president was Milo Holcomb. The secretary was the many-handed Daniel McNeil. At that date nothing was constitutional in this part of the state unless he was in it. Dr. R. C. Matthews was one of the later trustees. In 1870 he proposed reviving the old name. Mr. Pressly had requested the adoption of a name which would indicate a people's library, not only for this city but also for the county.

That early library never possessed any property except a few books naturally died out in time.

The following is the

ROLL OF DIRECTORS, DECEASED,

who have served the present library between 1868 and 1902: John E. Alexander, John S. Clark, H. B. Foskett, Samuel M. Hamilton, William Hanna, Chancey Harding, Jacob Holt, William Laferty, Robert C. Matthews, John Porter, Ivory Quinby, N. A. Rankin, J. K. Ripley, Edwin R. Smith, James H. Stewart, A. H. Swain, Henry Tubbs, William Walker, David A. Wallace, Elias Willits and Samuel Wood.

This list speaks for the character of the work done. These men helped with rare good judgment to organize success. They were prudent, public spirited and alive to the best interests of the community. Their aims were not narrow, nor partisan nor personal. They were trustees who could be trusted.

Here, as elsewhere, this object has attracted the co-operation of clear headed business men. The long and increasing list of the founders and promoters of libraries for the people includes the most successful men of affairs, such as Franklin, Tilden, Carnegie, Marshall Field, and Gladstone. They recognized the fact that in no other way can a gift, large or small, reach so great a number. Active, practical, busy men and women have been most interested in the Warren County Library.

During the year 1884

MR. JOHN D. THOMPSON.

of California, who had gone from Monmouth as a forty-niner, enlarged the usefulness of the reading room. He gave \$5,000 to the endowment, suggesting that the income therefrom be devoted to making the use of periodicals free in the library rooms.

It was requested by Mr. Thompson that no name be made public in this connection. This restriction was removed in a letter received sixteen years later, shortly before his death. When certain changes are made in the building a memorial window will be placed in the Reading Room in honor of him who made it free. He remembered the home of his boyhood in this gift. He shall not be forgotten.

The will of

MRS. SARAH C. SIMMONS

who died in 1899 put the library in possession of certain real estate, then valued at \$14,000, with the proceeds of its sale a building is to be erected as a memorial of her son. This building is to contain a library on the first floor. Mrs. Simmons had climbed the stairs for nearly thirty years to draw books. She had seen that the aged and the infirm need easier means of access.

The new building will also provide more room, which is much needed. Already the book space is nearly filled. The plan under consideration is, that the new building will contain the circulating library,

and the reading room and reference library will remain where they are. It is the usual method to have these apart, but in close proximity.

As the number of volumes increases, various departments are generally placed in different buildings or in different rooms. One thinks that a growing, properous public library is sure to need more room and yet again more room. A lot to the southeast, adjoining the library, was purchased in 1901. Vacant ground given by Mr. Pressly, is thus made easily accessible from the public square and can be used as the sites of additional buildings if that is deemed best.

Each year shows advance and improvement. The number of volumes, the number of readers and the cash receipts increase steadily. The Endowment grows by gifts received and by adding each year a part of the income. Thus the means are accumulating for future enlargements.

The experience of the older public libraries is that one person after another adds to their property and to their usefulness. It is well that the common wants of readers have here received the first gifts. Strange to say there are many people who will not read mathematics or theology. But a man's a man for a' that. And there is high authority for the democratic precept of the first Christian century,

HONOR ALL MEN.

That is what this library does, without fear and without favor. It is a republic of letters, where all men, women and children have equal rights. Such is clearly the intent of the department founded by Mr. W. P. Pressly.

This is now

A FREE REFERENCE LIBRARY,

where any one can use in the reading room, without charge, any of the books. It is the purpose to extend this free use very widely—to cover the county with free branches and travelling libraries, to provide strong departments for various classes of readers, to freely furnish books to the schools and to all ages, industries and nationalities in this vicinity. The best libraries are doing these things.

The use of our books and periodicals covers a very wide range. Information is sought here on almost every imaginable topic—literary, political, scientific, historical, religious and artistic. Our readers also seek that which is intensely practical. They read on house building, horse training, house furnishing, manufacturing, patent rights, machinery, gardening, farming, cookery, needlework and the fashions. The schools, the shops and the women's clubs, all receive large benefits. Stockmen investigate the registered pedigrees of their horses and cattle, using the genealogies of the Hambletonians, of the Durhams, and of other first families.

Although this library is intensely American and is as yet lacking to a great extent in foreign works or their translations, people of many nationalities frequent the rooms. It is worthy of note to mention one striking example of the educational influence of this free institution. For many years, a naturalized citizen who came from Linkoping, Sweden,

and here, whenever he had time from a laborious occupation. The result was that he became far better informed on American public affairs than most native voters are. His interest often-times expresses itself in the wish that some one of foreign birth would give this library the money found a European Department of translations and of books concerning the rope.

In the reading room, the best catalogues, indexes and works of reference are provided, to aid readers in looking up desired information themselves. This is a great advantage, as self-help is the best help. bulletin, published every three months, enables people at a distance to know what books they can order sent to them.

Wholesome recreation, for young and old, is provided. Very many who had no literary tastes have learned to use the best books. Children come to the rooms as soon as they can read. Boys who delighted in Indian stories, years ago, have grown up to be useful men, without alping any one.

The Warren County Library is incorporated, not as a single library but as

A SYSTEM OF LIBRARIES.

Our charter provides for "branches elsewhere and connections with other libraries." This outside extension is yet largely in the future. It is to be provided with funds. When our ship comes in, our books will travel widely. Their use is not restricted to this county.

Such an association of libraries will be built up here without income from taxation. The demands on public revenue are yearly increasing. In many places the library tax is deemed a burden and has been put down. Monmouth, even without it, has the distinction of being, probably, the most highly taxed city in the state.

Nor can the money for this purpose be obtained by general solicitation. This community is, for various objects, canvassed as excessively as is over-taxed. What this library has received has been freely given by those who will be remembered for benefits done to the entire community in which the donors have lived and prospered. By taking care of and enlarging these gifts they have become greater each year. Such gifts and the prudent management of property are the hope for future advancement.

The Association of directors is

A PERMANENT CORPORATION

It holds in trust the property and the management. The present life members are as follows: President, W. P. Pressly; Vice President, Fred Harding; Treasurer, W. H. Sexton; Secretary and Superintendent, W. H. Rogers; Trustees, O. S. Barnum, Ivory Quinby, C. M. Rodgers, J. Sipher, W. K. Stewart. Directors, Draper Babcock, C. V. Brooks, George Bruington, A. A. Cornell, D. D. Dunkle, Henry Jewell, J. M. Nieson, John McCoy, H. H. Pattee, W. P. Smith, and G. S. Tubbs.

Much of the most important work is done by committees, yearly appointed by this board. The books to be bought are selected by a com-

mittee of men and women who represent a wide variety of readers. Selections are not made with a critical indifference to popular tastes. The money did not come that way. Much valuable help has been given in cataloguing and indexing by persons interested in the success of the library. Committees of business men have looked after the buildings, finances, the investments and the auditing. These matters have been well managed that in the entire thirty-four years not one dollar of principal or interest has been lost. The librarian is Mr. T. M. Millen.

The governing corporation consists of a limited number of members holding their places during life or regular attendance on the meetings, fills its own vacancies. This form of constitution insures stability and permanency. There have been no upheavals, political or otherwise. A steady, uniform policy has been followed. The funds and other property are in the care of persons especially selected for prudent management of property. Politics, favoritism and wire-pulling have been entirely absent. There have been no dissensions or quarrels. The members of the association, differing widely in affiliation, have always worked harmoniously together. The object has been the public good as provided for by the gift received. No party, or sect, or class rules or is favored more than another. The funds and property received might have founded any one of various kinds of libraries. They have been used as was intended by the donor. The association holds this property in trust, not in fee simple, at its own pleasure.

The annual report for 1901 gives the following statistics: Number of volumes 20,597, of which 622 were added during the year; periodicals regularly received, 120; books and magazines drawn for use 69,438; current receipts for the year \$3,766.15; current expenditures \$3,102.90; endowment is now \$25,625, having been increased during the year \$1,482.

The W. P. Pressly Foundation produced during the year from rents and interest \$1,416.16, used for purchase of reading matter and for sustaining the buildings.

The John D. Thompson Gift is now \$7,380.65 and produced \$467 in income. This furnishes the free reading room.

The Mark Billings Building Fund from the bequest of Mrs. Sarah Simmons, holds at interest \$12,350 and real estate for sale, valued at \$100. This fund will be used for an additional building when the real estate is sold.

Those who have given largely have selected the purposes to which their gifts shall be applied. This is their right. Thus far the gifts have been for the popular department. This is not a theory. It is a condition.

OTHER NEEDED DEPARTMENTS

can be founded by others, with such conditions as the donors see fit to affix to what they give. To complete and enlarge the institution, special libraries of History, of Science and of European literature, most in translations, are needed; a children's room is needed; free branch libraries in various localities and in the schools of this county are needed.

nd a wholesale department to sustain this outside business. All these belong to the work of the modern public library. County libraries elsewhere ave such departments.

Each gift or bequest is held separate. Honor is given to whom honor is due. In each book is an inscription to show who gave it or from hose fund it was bought. There are memorial tablets on the buildings. he funds are reported each year under the names of the donors. This akes manifest whether these moneys are used as those who gave them intended. The published annual statements give publicity to the entire anagement.

All expenditures are made with careful economy. The library xpects every dollar to do its duty. That is the way the way the money ame. Over the door of the plain building, erected in 1870, the donor as placed the motto of the Ohio school at which he was once a student, *Prodesse quam Conspici.*" In administering his gift nothing has been one for display. If the money thus far received had gone into a fine ilding, there would have been a library without books and without the eans to meet current expenses. It has been constantly held in view that e first requisites are an abundance of acceptable reading matter and a re, ample income. A less conservative policy might easily have ought on the Warren County Library the fate which has befallen the arren County Fair.

The principle that

GIVERS HAVE RIGHTS

uch in respect to his own or her own gift, has been a guiding star to the anagement. This rule is enacted as a part of the Illinois law for public braries which are founded and sustained as this one is. The statute rectes that "the provisions of any will, deed or other instrument by hich endowment is given to said library and accepted thereby shall as said endowment be a part of the organic law of the corporation."

To create full-grown an association of free libraries such as this ne is to be, and, single-headed, to meet the needs of the masses and of e classes throughout the county, would require the gift of a millionaire. uch a system here must be the combined work of several persons, each unding or endowing a part.

This sketch reports progress and plans. The large success of what as been done gives assurance that what remains to be done, in order to lfil the purposes for which the Warren County Library exists, will be complished.



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